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ABSTRACT

Artifacts and animal remains found at the Central Aleutian Site are described. The site consists of a house pit and a midden, or refuse pile. The house and artifacts, used in the mid-1700s, were abandoned about the time the Russians first came to the Aleutian Islands. The following information is given for the different types of artifacts: actual-size illustration, whenever possible; description of how archaeologists think they were used, based on Russian accounts and contemporary use of similar objects; materials they were made of; and in what part of the site they were found. Location and material of manufacture tell a lot about the uses of the objects and resources which were available to the Aleuts. Most artifacts are made of natural substances, such as bone, ivory, and stone. Objects made of plant material or shells probably have decomposed. Cross-sectional diagrams of the house site as it was found and as archaeologists believe it to have appeared originally, are included. This handbook is intended to be used as part of the social studies unit, The Aleuts of the Eighteenth Century. (AV)

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Handbook for Central Aleutian Site

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Book IV

of

The Aleuts of the Eighteenth Century
Social Studies Unit

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Handbook for Central Aleutian Site

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ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK

This handbook describes the artifacts and animal remains found at the Central Aleutian Site. The site consists of a house pit and a midden (a pile of refuse, like an old garbage pile). The house and its artifacts were used in the middle of the 1700's, and for some reason were abandoned about the time the Russians first came to the Aleutian Islands.

Not every artifact from Central Aleutian Site has been shown in this handbook, for there were too many to picture. Instead, the different types of artifacts are shown and described.

In this Handbook you will find several different kinds of information about each artifact. First, there is an actual size illustration of the artifact (unless the artifact is too big; in that case the illustration is reduced as marked).

Second, under the heading Use, there is a short description of how archaeologists think the artifact was probably used. The archaeologists based their ideas on the way people use similar objects today and on the descriptions the Russians made in their early years in Alaska.

You should be able to find even more information in the artifacts in the booklet titled "As The Europeans Saw Them".

Third, under the heading Material of Manufacture, the Handbook tells what the artifacts were made of. You can get valuable clues about the way the early Aleuts lived by knowing what they used to make their tools and how they obtained the material.

Fourth, under the heading Distribution, you can learn what part of the site the artifacts were found in. Not all of them were found on the floor of the house. Some of them were found on the caved-in roof of the house. Others were found in the midden alongside the house. All of the artifacts were used at about the same time, even though they were used in different parts of the site.

With this information, you should be able to draw your own conclusions about the lives of the Aleuts who once lived at this site. We hope you enjoy the search!

FAUNAL REMAINS

The midden from this site contained many shells and bones that were not made into artifacts. These animal (called "faunal") remains help to indicate what the people who once lived in the house hunted and ate or used for clothing. Remains of some animals which were eaten would not show up in the midden, however. For instance, bird egg shells would not have lasted. Salmon and trout bones would not be found either, since these bones are very soft and would have decayed quickly.

The following lists are arranged to indicate how common were the remains for each animal species: the animal remains that occurred most often are at the top of the lists, those for which only a few examples were found are at the bottom of the lists.

INVERTEBRATES

sea urchins

limpets

mussels

chitons

snails

razor clams

butter clams

cockles

BIRDS

cormorants

albatross

ducks

puffins

shearwaters

SEA MAMMALS

sea otters

hair seals

sea lions

fur seal pups

whales

FISH

rock greenling

Irish lords

Pacific cod

halibut



ABOUT THE HOUSE

While excavating the house site, archaeologists were careful to pay attention to the material they removed in getting to the floor of the house. They were able to partially reconstruct the way the house was originally built, based on the material that lay on top of it. They reasoned that the walls of the house would have fallen onto the floor, and that the roof would have collapsed on top of it.

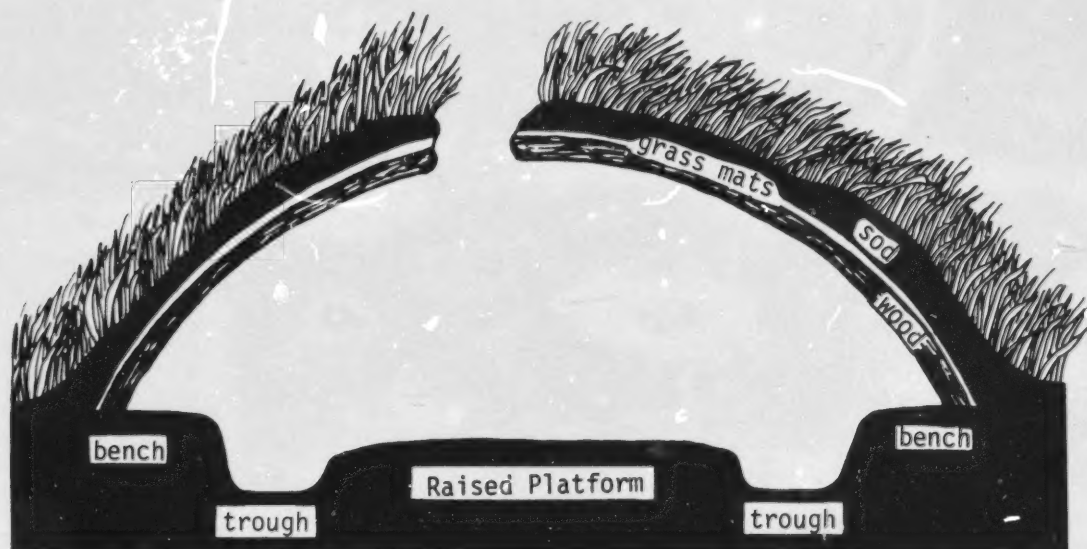
First, archaeologists had to clear away the recent growth of grass, putchkii (cow parsnip), low putchkii, fireweed, and fern. Then they were down to the level of the caved-in roof of the house. On this level they found a layer of

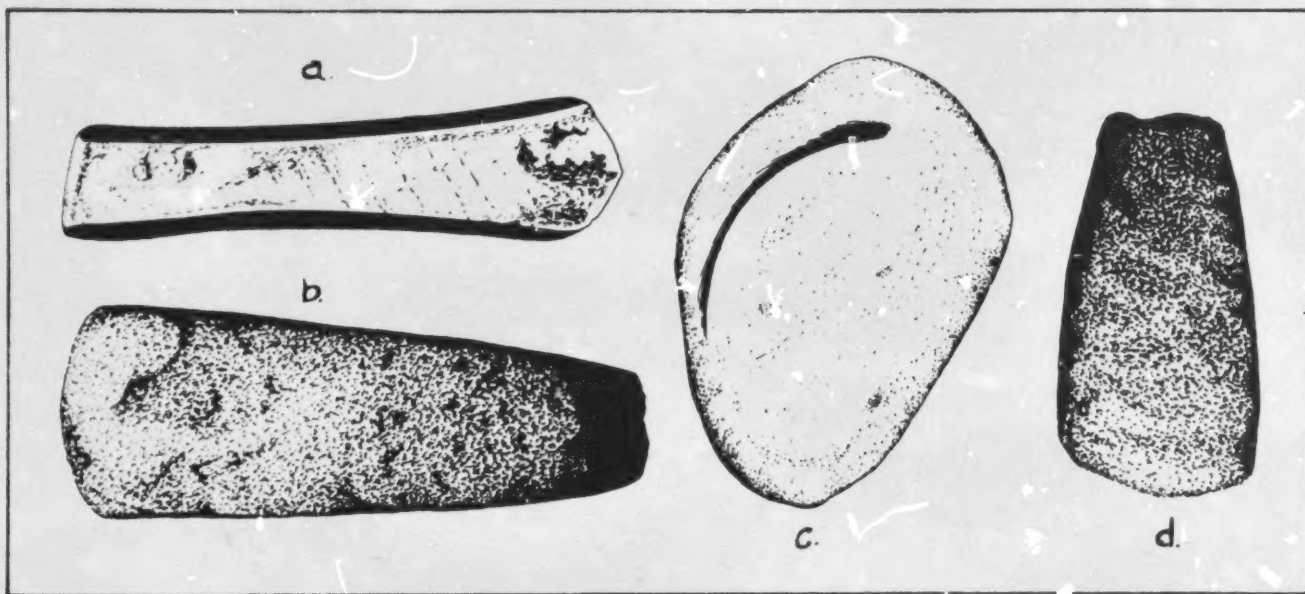
decomposed plants (called "humus") with artifacts sprinkled throughout it. Under the layer of humus they found a few remains of old wooden planks -- probably the support beams for the house. Once the humus and wood were removed, they were at the level which was originally the floor of the house. This was hard-packed dirt on bedrock, showing holes here and there where the original support beams had been sunk into the ground. There was also a patch of ochre stained into the floor (look under "Paint Grinder" for more information on this).

Based on this information, the archaeologists reconstructed the appearance of the house as it may have once stood: Its floor was below ground level. Wooden beams were set into the floor to support the walls and roof. Although there were no remains of grass mats in the house pit, the archaeologists guessed that mats may have been placed on top of the beams. They based this on the descriptions of Aleut houses which Russian and English explorers have left. On top of the grass mats, the Aleuts probably placed chunks of sod. This would account for the humus layer that was found above the wooden beams. Perhaps the Aleuts worked on their roofs. This would account for the artifacts that were found in the

humus layer.

The illustration below shows the house as the archaeologists imagine it to have originally appeared.





ABRADERS AND WHETSTONES

Use

The Aleuts used many implements which needed to be sharpened and smoothed periodically. They used abraders or whetstones for this purpose. The abraders pictured above were used for the following tools:

1. Knife and adze blades (Figures a and b).
2. Needles and awls (Figure c).
3. To smooth and finish bone points (Figure d).

Material of Manufacture

Abraders and whetstones were made of a variety of different types of rocks. Some (Figure c) were made of a soft sandstone. Others (Figures a, b,

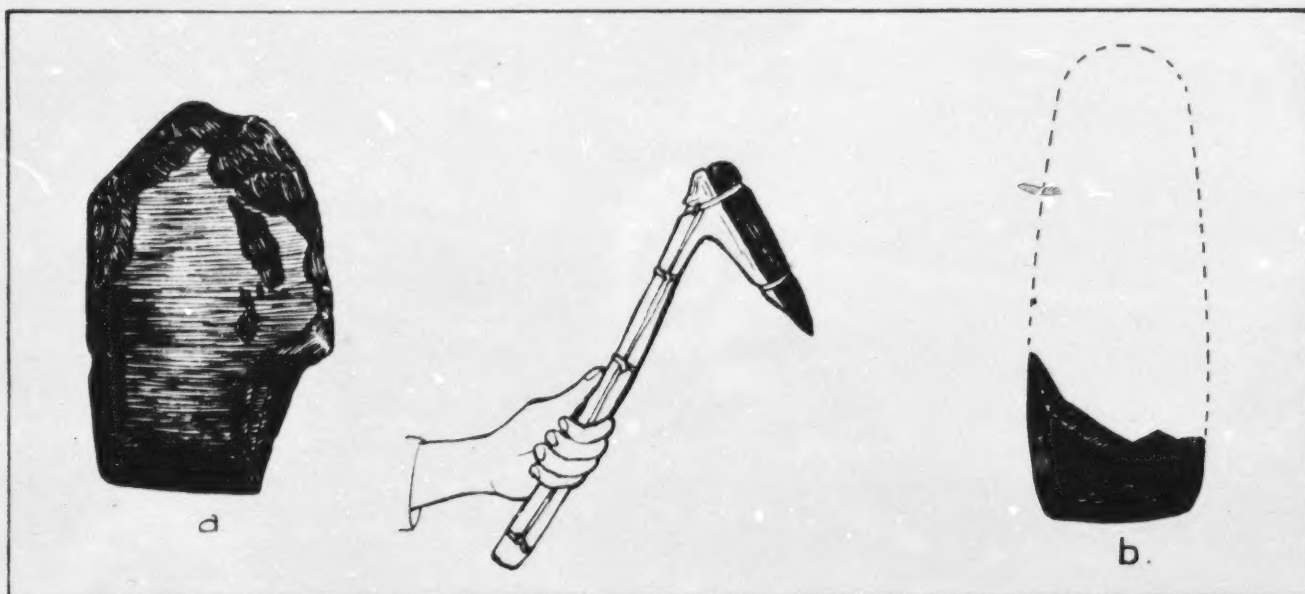
and d) were made of a harder rock called andesite.

Distribution

Roof of house: 15

Floor of house: 9

Midden: 16



ADZE BLADES

Use

Adzes are wood-working tools, used to chip away or plane a wooden plank. The Aleuts used different sized adzes for different purposes: the smaller the adze blade, the finer the work it would do.

Adzes were generally hafted on a wooden handle. (The illustration above shows an "elbow adze".) The person chopped toward himself, chipping off long flakes of wood from the plank.

Material of Manufacture

Adze blades were made of a hard rock called green stone and were either chipped with a flaker

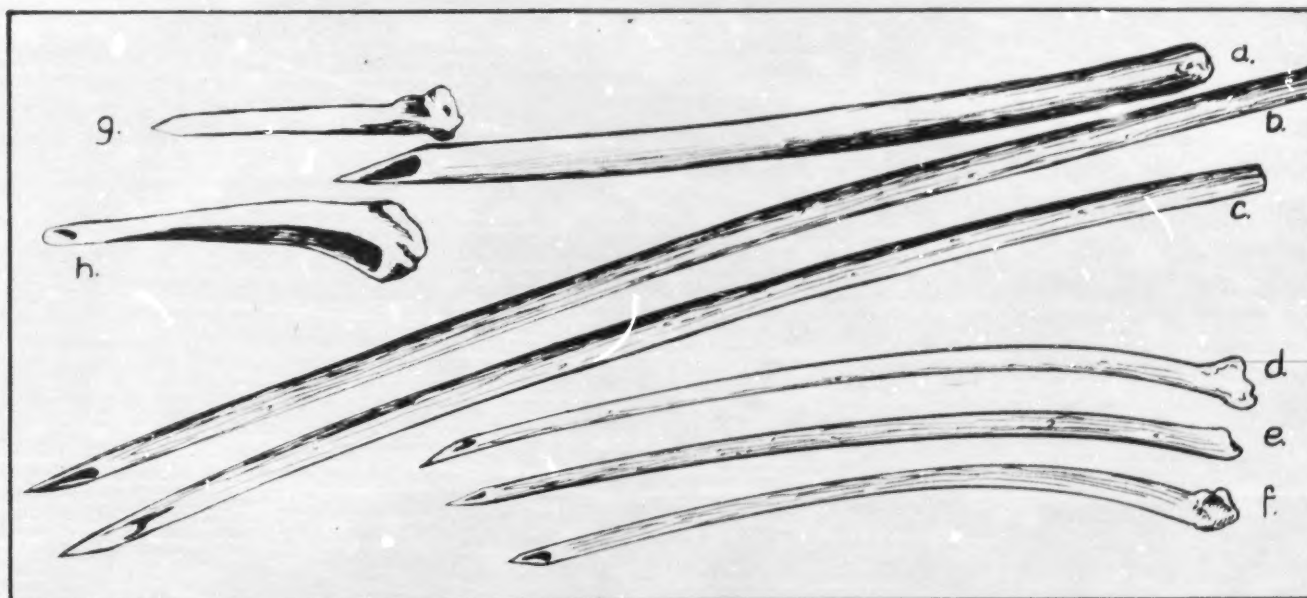
or, more often, ground with a whetstone to
form a sharp edge.

Distribution

Roof of house: 2

Floor of house: 2

Midden: 7



AWLS

Use

Awls are sharply-pointed tools which can be used for several different tasks:

1. They can be used to split sinew to make thin thread for sewing (Figures a-c above).
2. They can be used to poke holes in skin through which sinew thread is then pulled (Figures d-g above).
3. They can be used to hand drill holes in wood.
4. They can be used to make grooves in bone or to split the bone to make other tools (Figure h).

Material of Manufacture

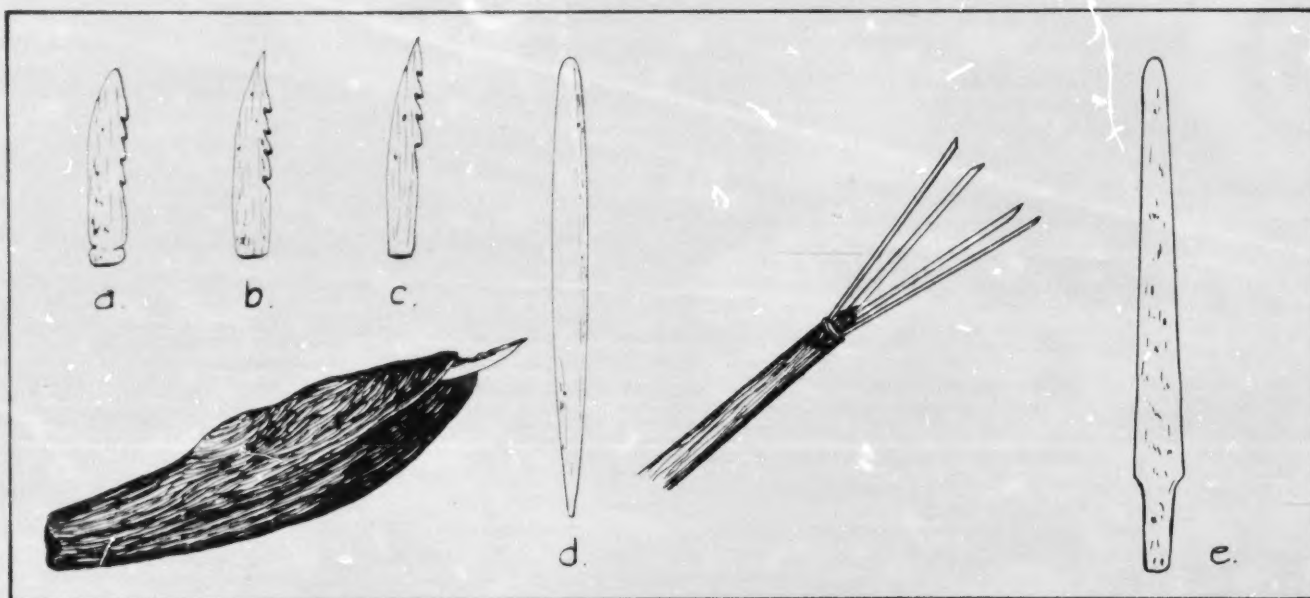
Aleut awls were usually made of hollow bird bones (a-c above were albatross bones; d-f and h were cormorant bones) or small mammal bones (g is a sea otter bone).

Distribution

Roof of house: 1

Floor of house: 7

Midden: 1



BONE POINTS

Use

The Aleuts made many different types of bone points to serve many different purposes. The bone points found at this site are of three types:

1. Figures a-c show points which were probably set into a blunt wooden bird dart (see illustration).
2. Figure d shows the type of point that was one of a set lashed together to form a sea urchin spear. The spear was pushed into a shallow area where sea urchins were known to live. The harder the person pushed on the spear, the closer

the sea urchin was pushed to the
spear shaft, and the more firmly
it was held in place.

3. Figure e was probably used as an
arrowhead.

Material of Manufacture

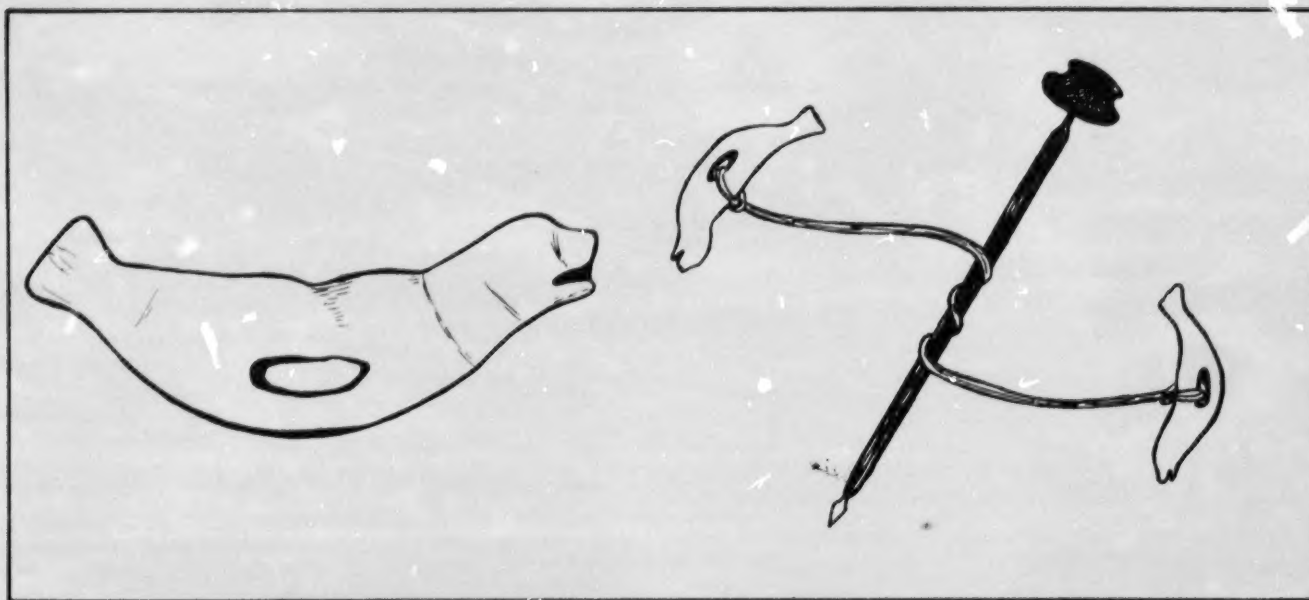
These points were made of bird bone, the
bones of small sea mammals, and whale bone
(figure e).

Distribution

Roof of house: 15

Floor of house: 7

Midden: 0



CARVED SEAL

Use

The use of this seal is not known. It could have been the handle of a long leather cord which was used to spin a drill.

Material of Manufacture

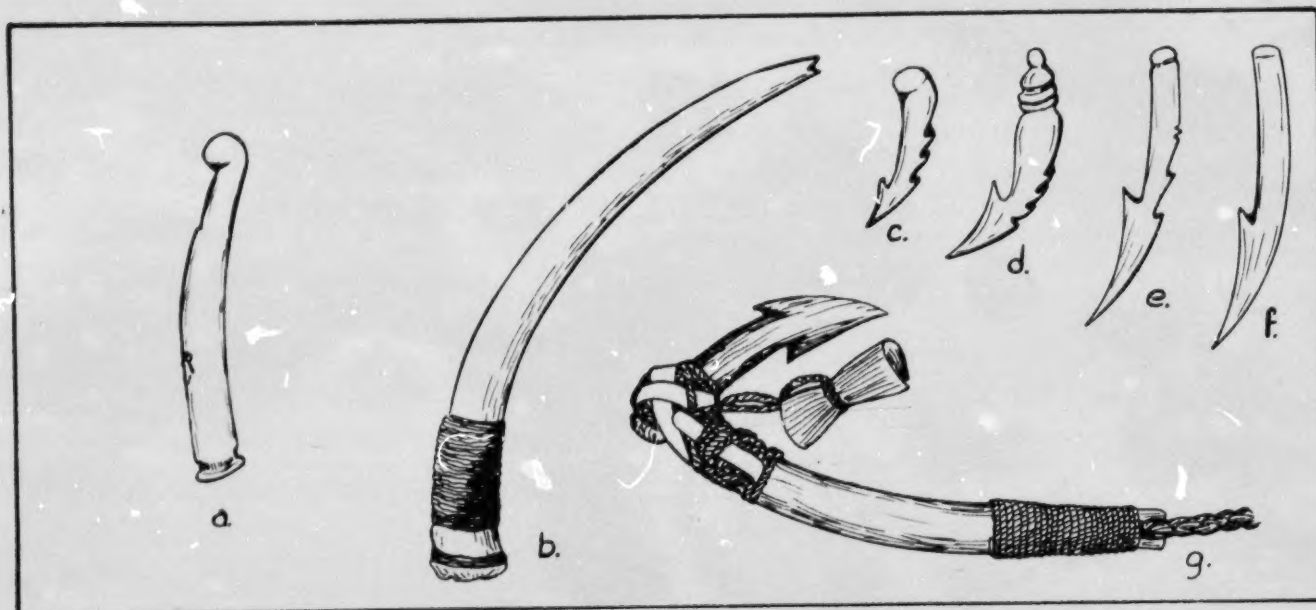
Ivory

Distribution

Roof of house: 0

Floor of house: 1

Midden: 0



FISH SHANKS AND FISH HOOKS

Use

Fish shanks (Figures a & b) were one part of a two-piece fish hook. The hooks themselves are shown in Figures c-f.

The illustration (Figure g) shows a complete fish hook with shank and hook lashed together. This type of fish hook was used in fishing for cod and halibut.

Material of Manufacture

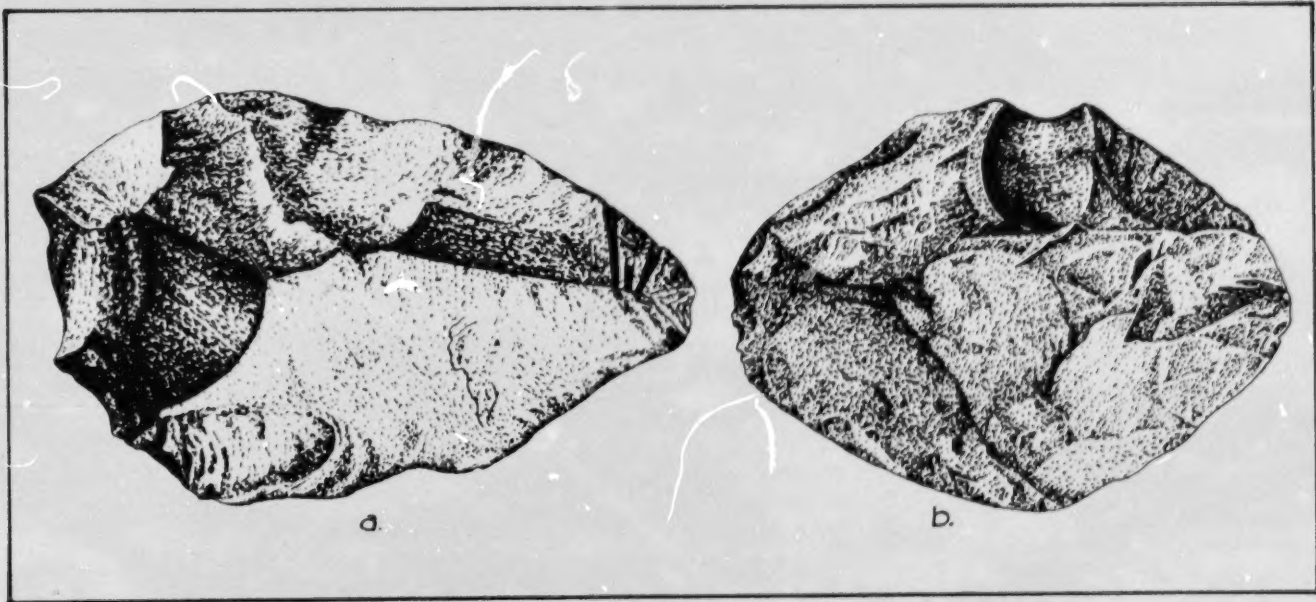
The fish shanks were made of seal rib. The fish hooks were made of bone.

Distribution

Roof of house: 8

Floor of house: 0

Midden: 2



FLAKE CORES

Use

Flake cores are the rocks from which large sharp flakes were knocked. The large flakes were then made into tools such as knife blades, points, and scrapers by chipping away at the edges to make the tool into the proper shape.

Material of Manufacture

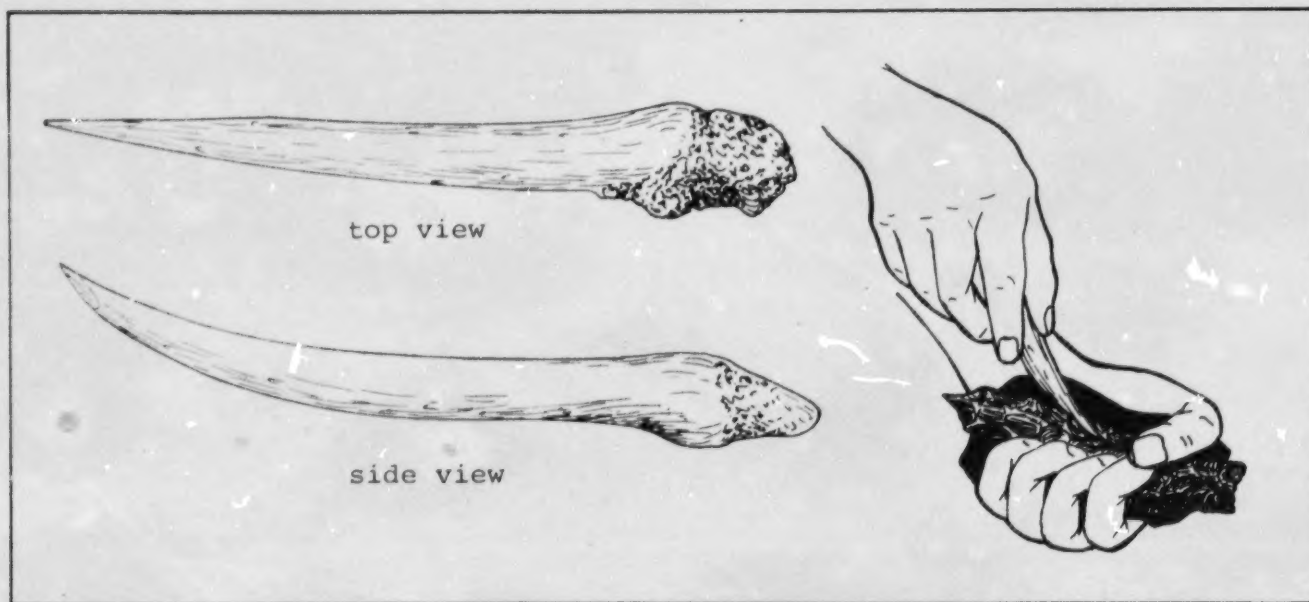
The flake cores found at this site were beach or stream pebbles.

Distribution

Roof of house: 9

Floor of house: 2

Midden: 0



FLAKER

Use

Flakers were the tools that were used to chip small pieces of stone from a flake in order to shape that flake into a usable tool. To retouch (or chip) a stone tool a man held a piece of sea lion skin in his left hand and put the flake on the skin. This protected the man's hand. With his right hand he held the flaker and gently pressed off small chips of stone until the tool was the proper shape.

Material of Manufacture

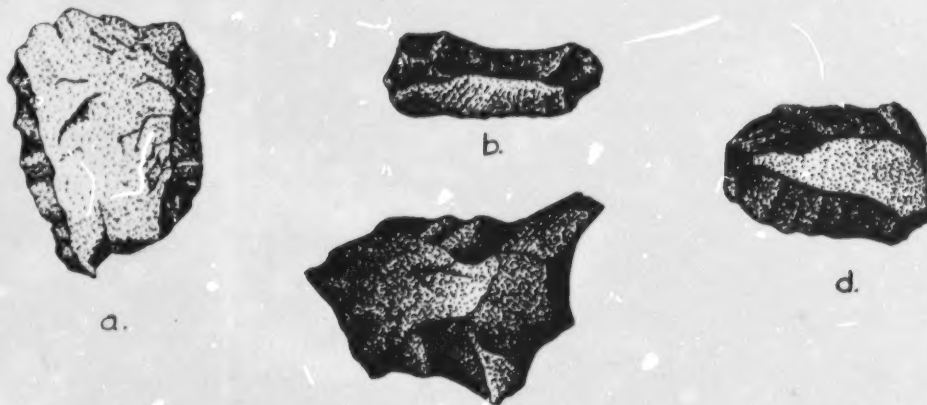
The flakers from this site were made of sea otter ribs.

Distribution

Roof of house: 6

Floor of house: 1

Midden: 0



FLAKES

Use

Flakes are the pieces of rock that have been split off from a core. They are the "blanks", or unfinished pieces of rock from which tools were going to be made when the Aleuts abandoned this site. The flakes might have been planned for knife blades, points, or scrapers.

Material of Manufacture

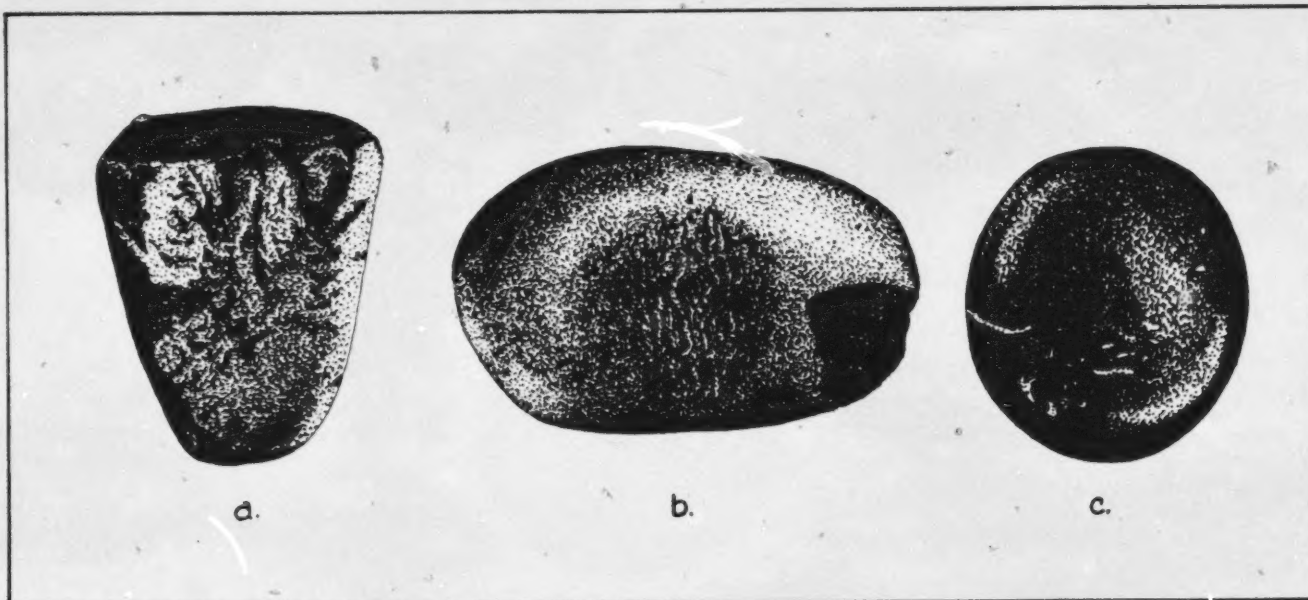
Most of the flakes at this site were made from hard rock types called chert and flint.

Distribution

Roof of house: 20

Floor of house: 5

Midden: 5



HAMMERSTONES

Use

Hammerstones were used in many different activities: whenever a person needed to hammer, tap, batter, or crush something. These hammerstones were not hafted to a handle, but instead were held in the hand. Figure b shows the pitting in the middle of the stone, caused by repeated hammering.

Material of Manufacture

Stone, usually a beach or river pebble.

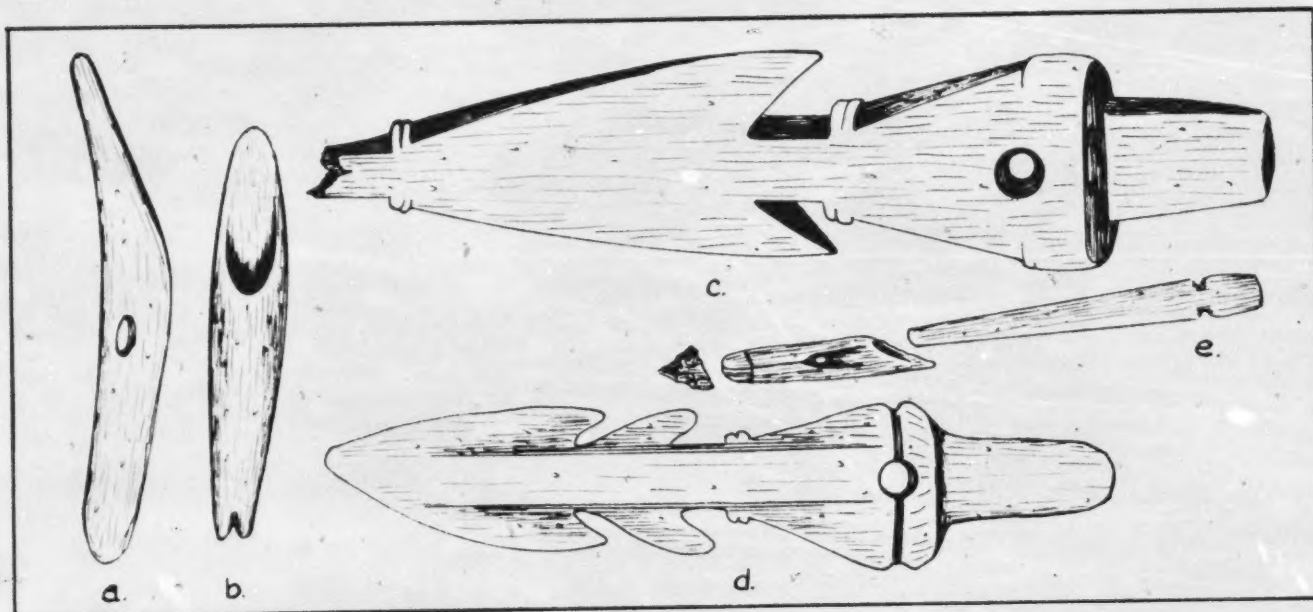
Distribution

Roof of house: 3

Floor of house: 3

Midden: 2

23



HARPOONS AND HARPOON HEADS

Use

Harpoons are spears with detachable heads. The harpoon heads could come off the shafts, but were attached to a long line which the hunter could hold onto so that the head would not be lost once the harpoon was thrown.

Figures a-d are harpoon heads used to hunt sea mammals. The hunter threw the harpoon at the animal, and the harpoon head went into the animal and came loose from its wooden shaft; meanwhile the hunter kept hold of the attached line. The animal swam around and dived into the water trying to get away from the harpoon, but instead merely tired itself out. Finally, when

it was exhausted, the hunter pulled it in with the rope and killed it.

Figure e is a toy harpoon found on the house floor.

Material of Manufacture

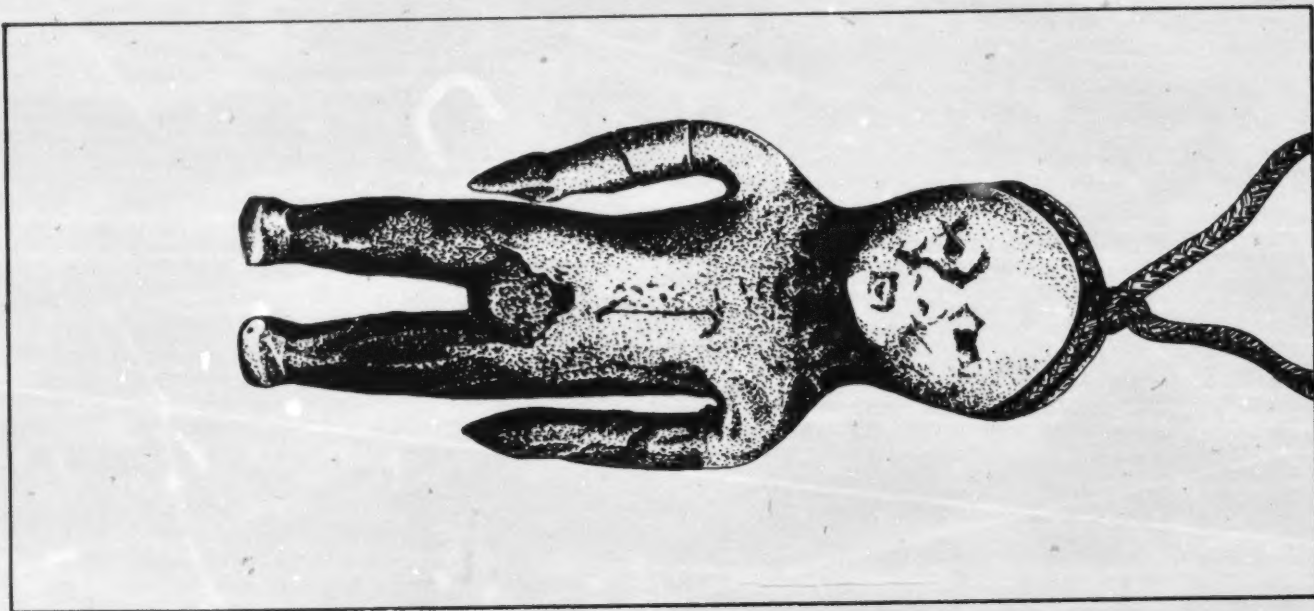
Sea mammal bone.

Distribution

Roof of house: 8

Floor of house: 2

Midden: 2



KADARGARGH

Use

The kadargargh, or Image of the Deity, was hung from a roof beam of the barabara. It was a very powerful amulet and was prayed to by each man as he left for a hunting trip. Each house had its own kadargargh.

Material of Manufacture

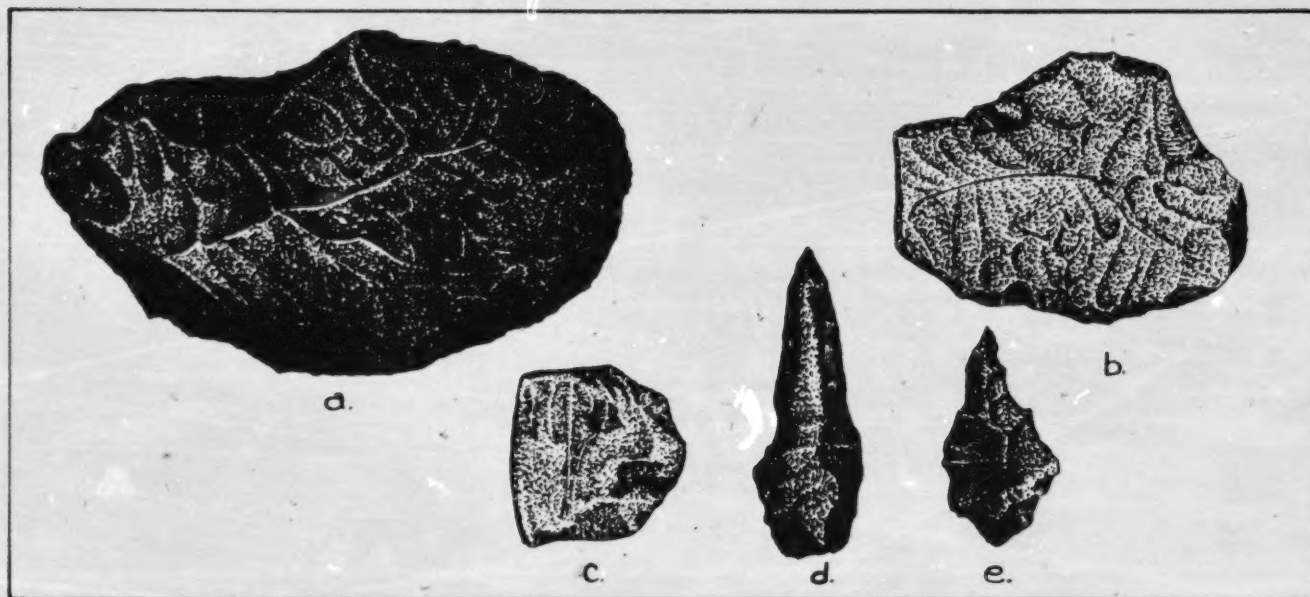
Kadargarghs were made of ivory, bone, or wood. The kadargargh found at this site was made of walrus ivory.

Distribution

Roof of house: 0

Floor of house: 1

Midden: 0



KNIFE BLADES

Use

Many different sizes and shapes of knife blades were found at this site. Those which have a narrow base (Figures a-b) were probably hafted to a wooden or bone handle. Sharply pointed knives (Figures d & e) were probably not hafted. They may have been used as surgeon's knives or lancets. The knife blades with rounded edges (Figure c) were probably used in women's knives.

Material of Manufacture

All knife blades were made of stone, but some were chipped with a flaker to make a blade and others (for instance, Figure c), made of

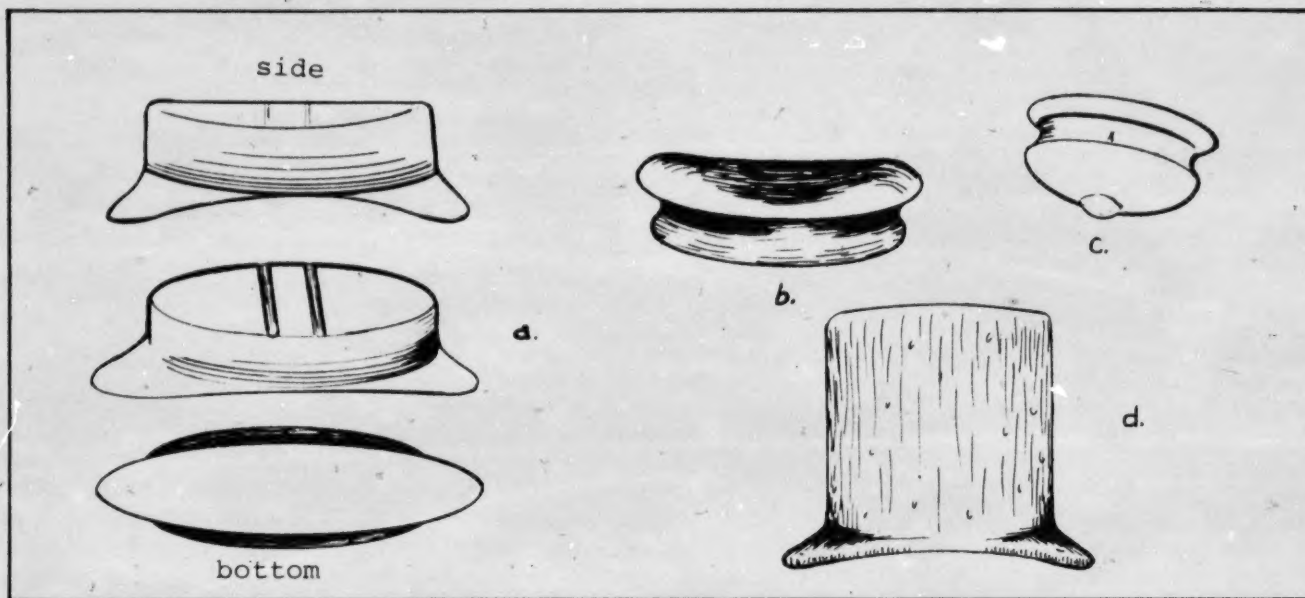
shale or slate, were ground down to a sharper edge with a whetstone.

Distribution

Roof of house: 10

Floor of house: 4

Midden: 10



LABRETS

Use

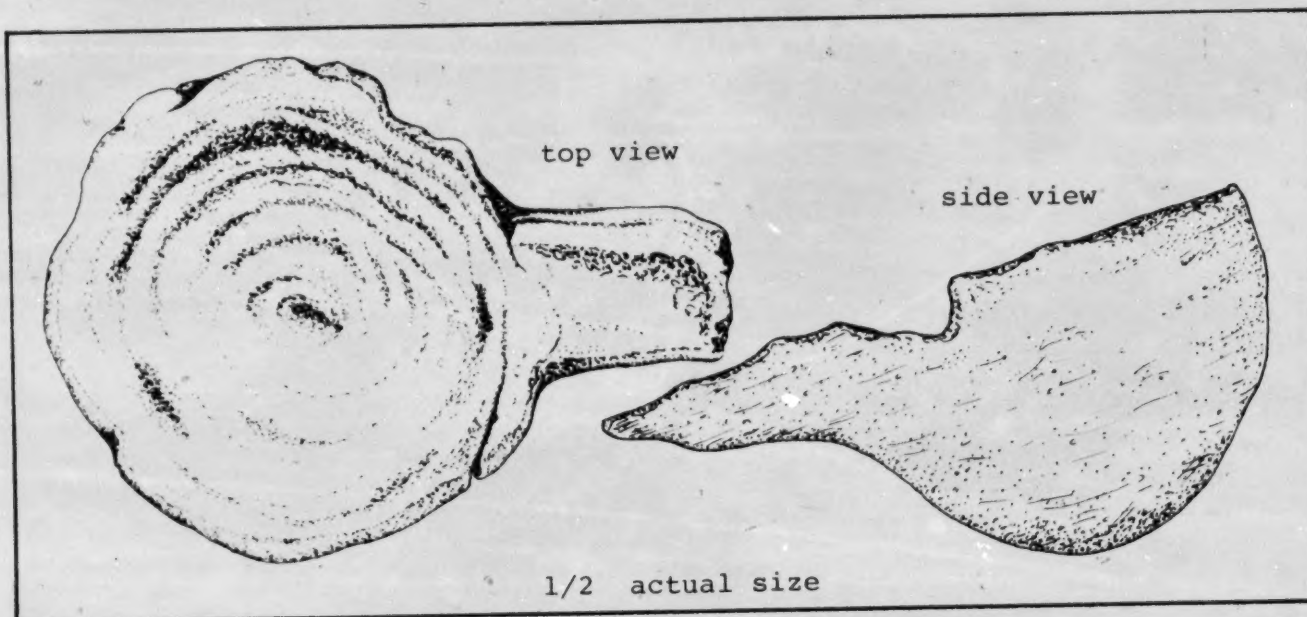
Labrets were worn as ornaments. They were buttoned in a slit that had been made in the lip: some were worn in the upper lip, others in the lower lip or the corners of the mouth.

Material of Manufacture

Labrets from this site were made of bone, ivory, and slate.

Distribution

Roof of house: 1
 Floor of house: 2
 Midden: 1



LADLE

Use

Russians reported that Aleuts ate much of their food raw though they did cook sea mammal meat and some fish. This ladle may have been used in dishing up a hot meat or fish stew.

Material of Manufacture

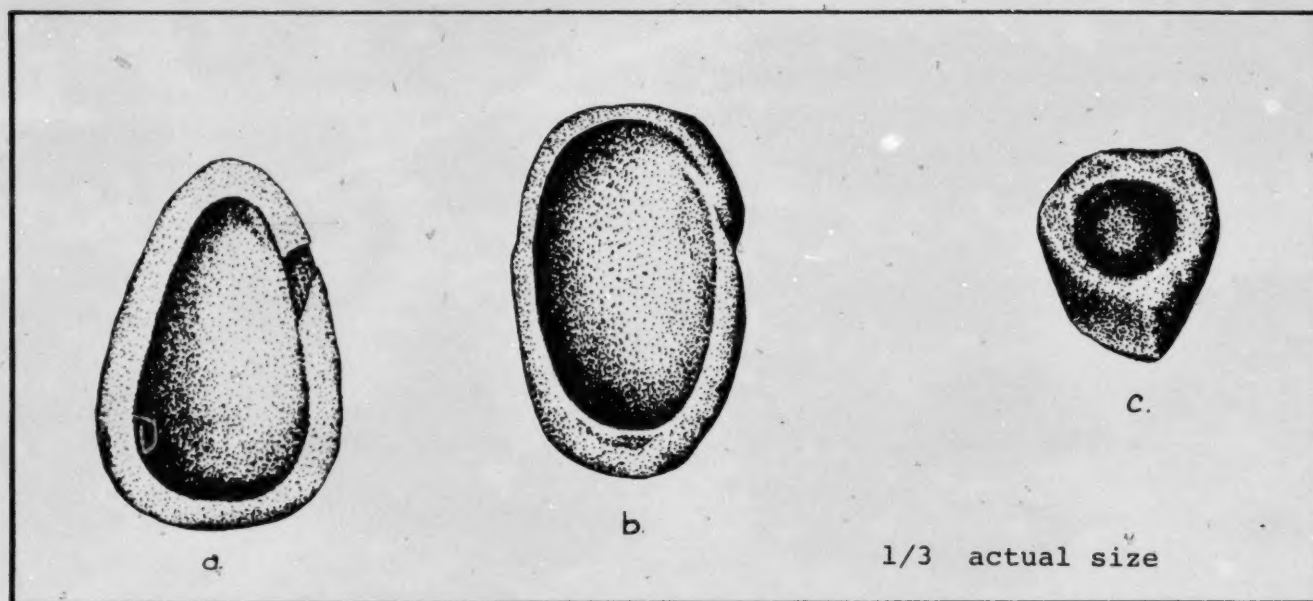
This is a hollowed-out whale vertebra.

Distribution

Roof of house: 0

Floor of house: 0

Midden: 1



LAMPS

Use

The Aleuts used two types of stone lamps:
 i'xtax', which were small lamps used to light the
 houses or were carried by hunters on trips;
 (Figure c) and a'nux' which were large lamps that
 men and women stood over to dry and warm them-
 selves after working outside (Figures a & b).
 Each family had its own set of lamps.

Material of Manufacture

Most Aleut lamps were made of hard beach rocks
 with a central bowl pecked out. The lamps found
 in this site had oil stains in their bowls.

Distribution

Roof of house: 0

Floor of house: 2

Midden: 0



MOUTHPIECE OR PLUG

Use

This mouthpiece is of a type which was used to plug the holes in seal bladders so they could be inflated and would float. Seal bladders were often attached to a harpoon shaft by a line through the hole in the handle of the plug. When an animal was speared, the bladder remained attached to the shaft and acted like a drag on the animal, tiring it out as it tried to dive underwater.

Material of Manufacture

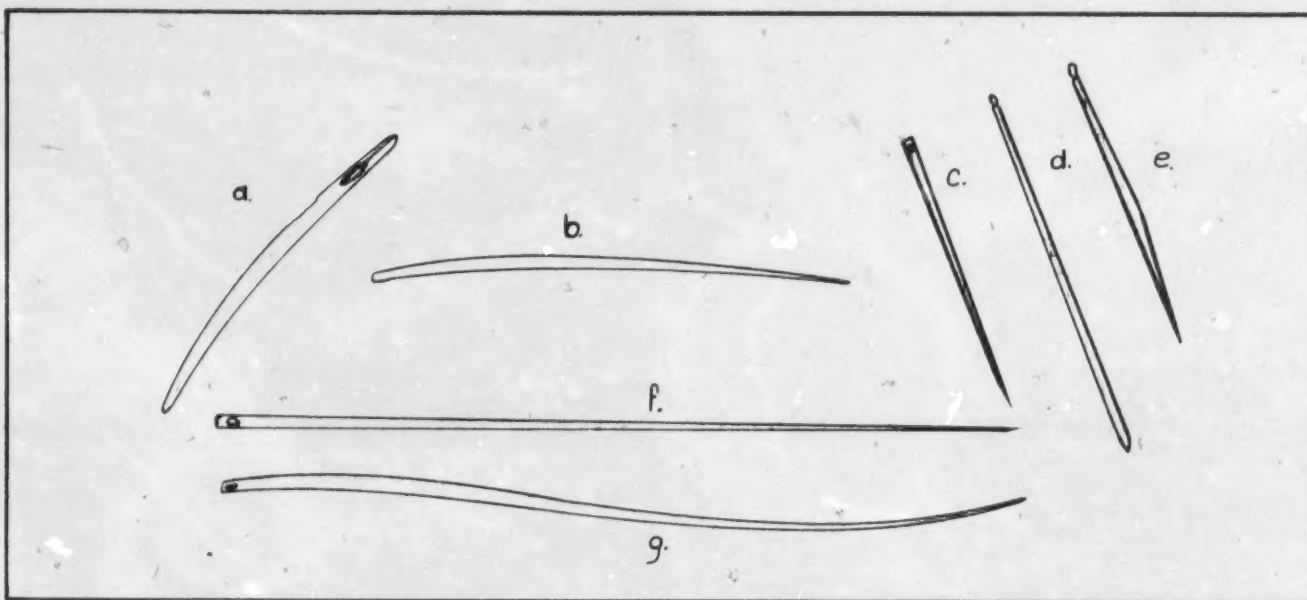
Ivory

Distribution

Roof of house: 0

Floor of house: 1

Midden: 0



NEEDLES

Use

Needles were used by the Aleuts in sewing skins for clothing, bidarki covers, or making bags and pokes. Many Aleut needles did not have eyes, but instead had notches at one end to which the sinew thread was tied (Figures d-e).

Material of Manufacture

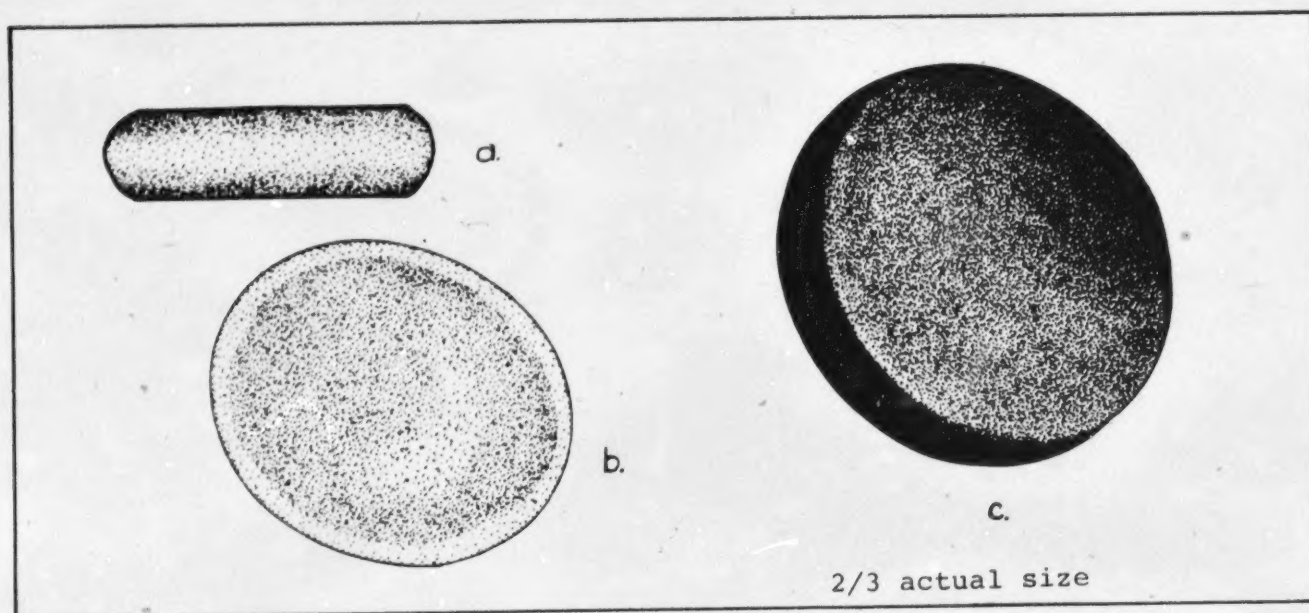
These needles were made of bird bone or ivory.

Distribution

Roof of house: 0

Floor of house: 3

Midden: 0



PAINT GRINDER

Use

Red ochre chunks were placed on a flat stone (called a "palette"). They were pounded and ground into a powder using a paint grinder. The ochre was then mixed with fat to form a paste and painted on a person or an implement.

Ochre was an important material in Aleut culture. It was used in burials, on hunting equipment to represent blood, and as a face paint in preparation for war.

Material of Manufacture

Most paint grinders were made from a hard rock called chert.

Distribution

Roof of house: 0

Floor of house: 1

Midden: 0



PEBBLES

Use

The use that was made of these pebbles is not known. They could have been used as parts of a game in which several stones were thrown in the air at one time and had to all be caught in one hand. Or, they could have been good luck charms carried by sea otter hunters.

Material of Manufacture

They are made of a smooth white stone called "chalcedony." They have not been chipped or flaked, but were found in their natural state, and probably came from a stream bed or beach.

Distribution

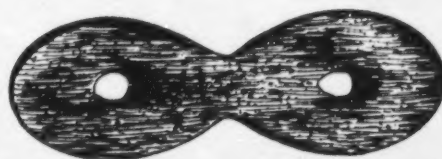
Roof of house: 0

Floor of house: 23 in one group

Midden: 0



a.



b.

QUSI'DAX'

Use

Qusi'dax' were ornaments. They were worn hanging by a sinew thread from the nasal septum.

Material of Manufacture

These qusi'dax' were made of the bone of a sea mammal.

Distribution

Roof of house: 0

Floor of house: 2

Midden: 0



ROOT DIGGERS,
BEAMERS, PRYING TOOLS

Use

These tools were used to dig edible roots or for any activity that required a lever or pick.

Material of Manufacture

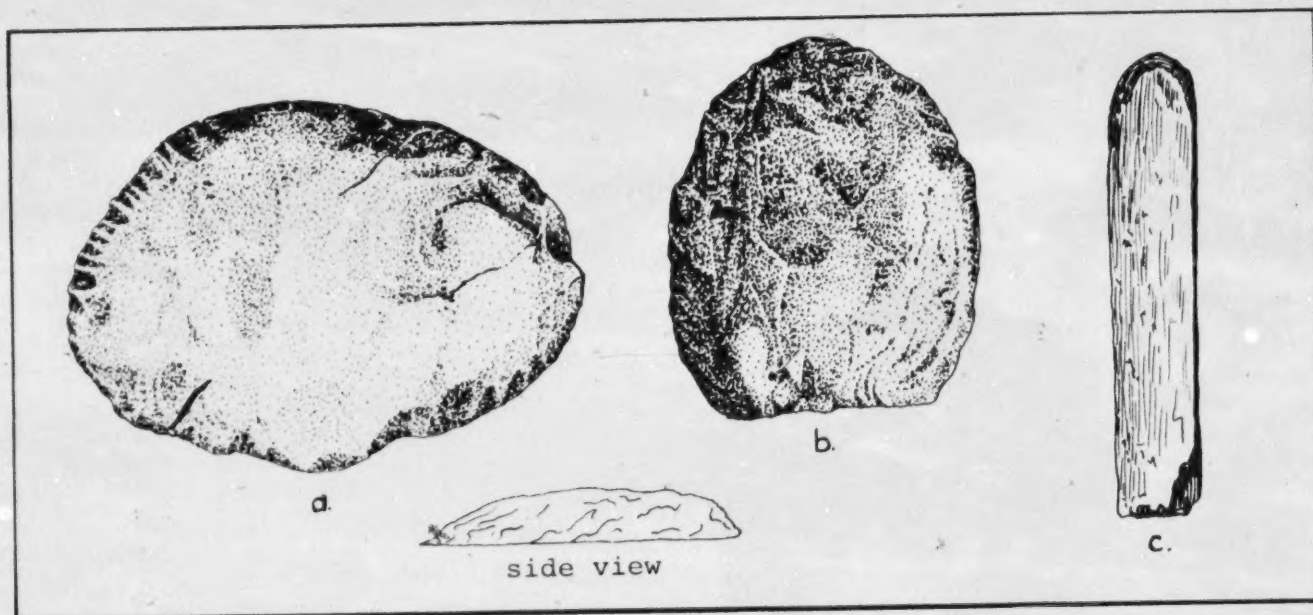
These were made of whale bone and sea lion ribs.

Distribution

Roof of house: 3

Floor of house: 2

Midden: 1



SCRAPERS

Use

Scrapers were used to scrape the meat, fat, and fur off a skin so that it could be made into clothing or used for other purposes. If the meat and fat were not removed, the skin would rot and be unusable.

Material of Manufacture

Scrapers a & b were made of stone that was chipped to make a good scraping edge. A scraper needs to have a steep edge in cross-section (see illustration) so that it will not cut the skin that is being scraped. Scraper c was made of sea mammal bone.

Distribution

Roof of house: 0

Floor of house: 3

Midden: 1



SEA MAMMAL TEETH

Use

Sea mammal teeth were probably used as pendants. Some of them might be what were called su'klun, which were hung from both sides of the qusi'dax' as ornaments.

Material of Manufacture

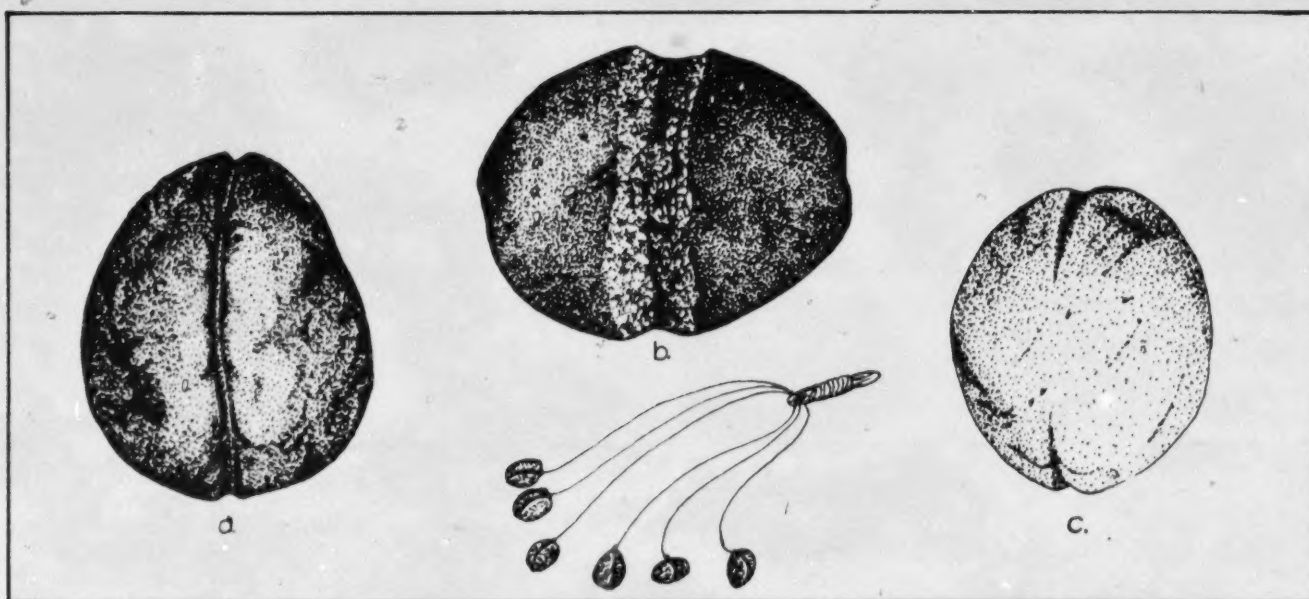
The teeth found at this site were from the spotted seal and the sea lion.

Distribution

Roof of house: 0

Floor of house: 3

Midden: 0



SINKERS

Use

There is no evidence that the Aleuts used fish nets before the Russians arrived, so these were probably used to weight fish lines. The larger sinkers might have been used in fishing for halibut and cod. The smallest ones might have actually been weights for a bola, which is an implement used in hunting birds. The bola is made up of several stones tied to thongs which are then tied together (see illustration). The hunter holds on to the handle, twirls it around his head, and then flings it into a flock of birds. The stones wrap themselves around a bird's feet, neck, or wings, which brings it down.

Material of Manufacture

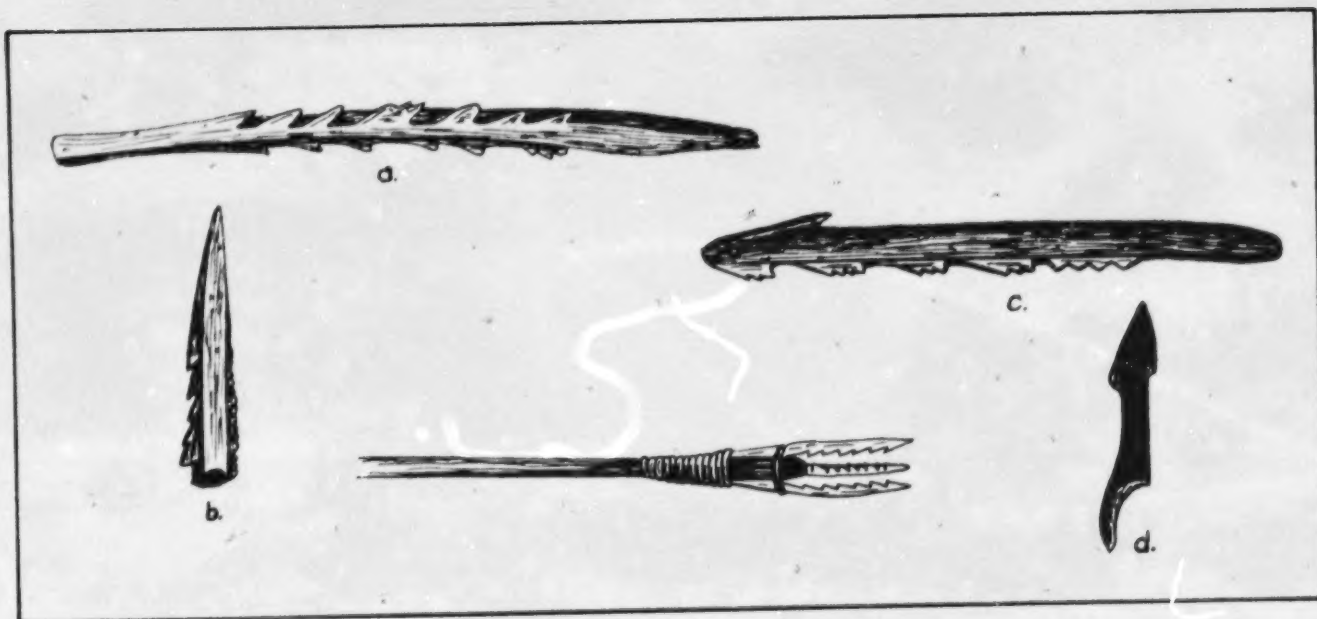
Sinkers and bola weights were made of heavy beach or river pebbles.

Distribution

Roof of house: 10

Floor of house: 2

Midden: 2



SPEAR HEADS

Use

Spear heads were lashed permanently into a wooden shaft. The Aleuts made several different types of spear heads for the different tasks they had to perform. For instance:

1. Figure a was the type of spear head commonly used in warfare or for hunting sea mammals on land.
2. Figures b-c were the type of spear heads that were used together in groups of three as a salmon or trout spear or a bird spear (see illustration).

3. Figure d was a side prong for a salmon
spear.

Material of Manufacture

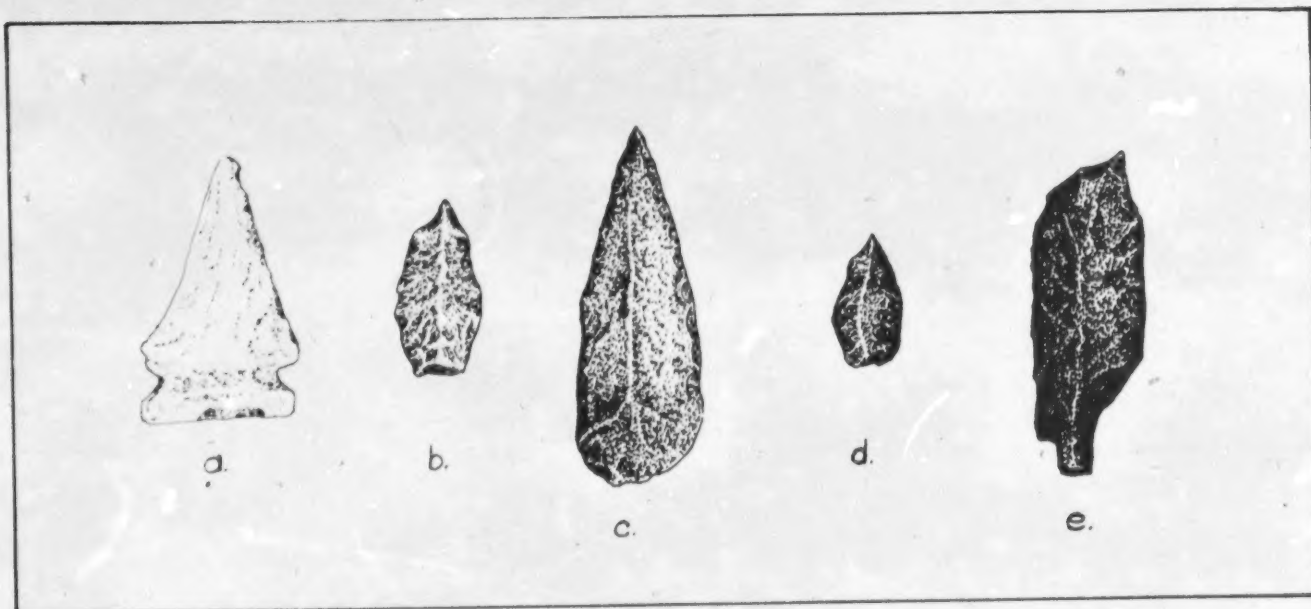
These spear heads were made of whalebone
and walrus ivory.

Distribution

Roof of house: 12

Floor of house: 2

Midden: 0



STONE POINTS

Use

Stone points were used as either arrow heads or were fitted into bone harpoon and spear heads to make a sharper point.

Material of Manufacture

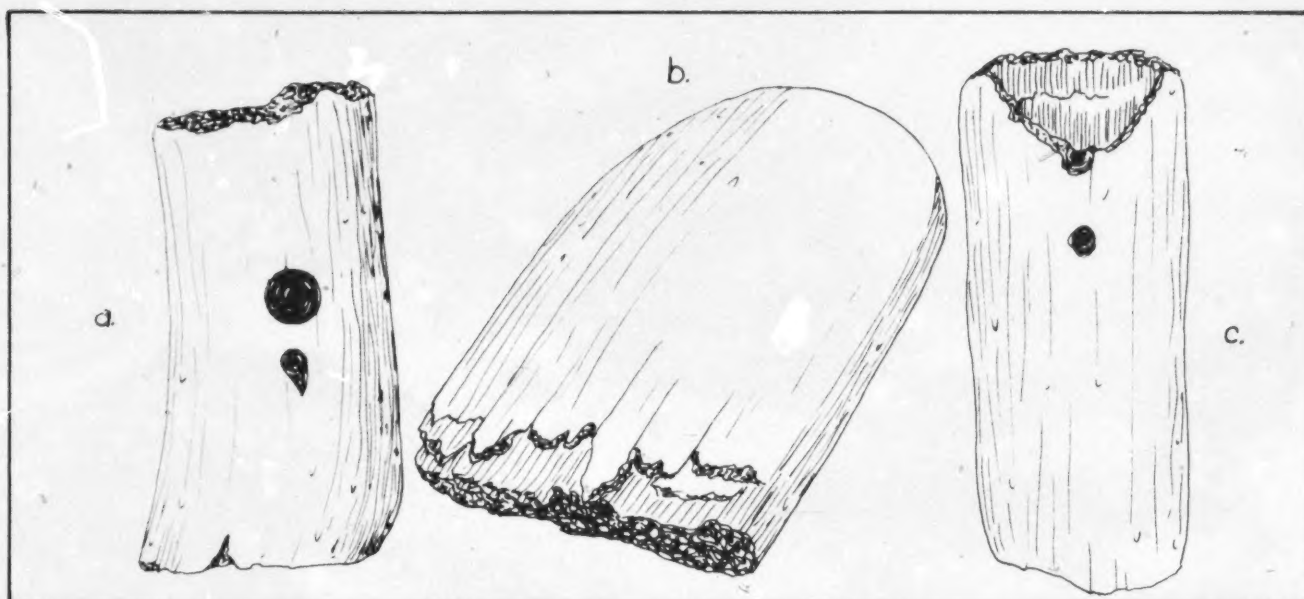
Most of the stone points in this site were made of a rock called basalt. There were also a few chert points.

Distribution

Roof of house: 9

Floor of house: 7

Midden: 0



WEDGES

Use

Wedges were wood-working tools used in splitting driftwood logs into smaller planks. These planks were used for several different things: bidarki frames, house posts, spear shafts, and so forth.

Some of the wedges found at this site show that they were used for another purpose as well. These wedges (Figures a and c) have holes drilled partway through them which show that they were used with drills-perhaps as the handle which supported the drill as it was spun around.

Material of Manufacture

The wedges from this site were made of whalebone.

Distribution

Roof of house: 4

Floor of house: 2

Midden: 11